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China: A Country of Contrasts

Wilda Newman

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CHINA: A COUNTRY OF CONTRASTS BY WILDA B. NEWMAN

Ni Hao [Nee How], Hello, or Ni Zhao [Nee Zhao] Good morning, thus began our introduction to China and the 62nd International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) General Conference, August 1996 in Beijing! [Picture A] Banners were flying [Picture B] and headlines acclaimed our presence in the newspaper, *China Daily*.

We arrived in Beijing to find a comfortable climate, little rain, and colleagues from 91 countries. This conference was the largest ever in attendance (2,378 total delegates) since the beginning of IFLA in 1927. Total participation, including volunteers, journalists, exhibitors, totaled over 3,000. Close to 200 accompanying persons were registered, and China checked in with 800 delegates, the largest national delegation of the host country ever to attend the annual meeting. The United States usually has about 10 percent of the total in participation, no matter the location nor the total participants, and this year was no different. These numbers and the success of the conference, "The Challenge of Change: Libraries and Economic Development," seemed even more fitting since China was one of the original founders of IFLA, and change was all around us. [Picture C]

The theme was chosen by the Chinese Organizing Committee because "...society is reexamining the value of information as a component of the engine

of economic development. The social functions performed by libraries are evolving towards new and expanded roles: greater recognition is being given to the educational role of libraries in assisting the development of the intellectual capital of every country: information is valued as an economic resource and new technologies have made it instantly and globally available.

Librarians can use their information management skills to play a leading role in this new information environment."

"...this theme reflects the different facets of information as one of the key elements in contemporary economic and social life." Sub-topics associated with this theme for programming by the divisions, sections, and core programs included:

- 1) Libraries as gateways to information;
- 2) Continuing education of librarians in a changing environment;
- 3) Resource sharing: local, national and international issues;
- 4) Identifying user needs;
- 5) Taking information to the users;
- 6) Networking and document delivery;
- 7) The library as a key to exploiting economic resources;
- 8) Funding of library and information services: dilemmas and solutions; and
- 9) The role and image of libraries in developing countries.

Several delegates from the U.S. are members of the Special Libraries

Association (SLA) and there are currently three very active delegates that are members of the Science-Technology Division. These are Monica Ertel, Dorothy McGarry, and Wilda Newman, all past-chairs of Sci-Tech. Dorothy is the current SLA IFLA Representative; and Monica and Wilda are both elected members of the Standing Committee on Information Technology, for example. Each plays other roles too by participating in the programs and the programming as well as working on committees and projects of IFLA. Nancy Anderson, current Chair-Elect of the Sci-Tech Division has previously been active in IFLA. For more information about IFLA or specifically about the conference, contact any one of them.

Papers are available on many of the sessions, see Table 1. (When my shipment from China arrives, I will be happy to provide copies where I can of the conference published papers). And, workshops covered are noted in Table 2. Some papers are also available on IFLA's IFLANET.

URL:<http://WWW.NLC.BNC.CA/CGI-BIN/IFLA-LWGATE/>

The Universal Dataflow and Telecommunications (UDT) Core Programme sponsored the Internet room in Beijing. [Picture D] A mix of PCs and MACs were available for exploring the web, using email, and IFLANET demonstrations that included personnel available for answering questions regarding IFLA's web site.

The United States held its caucus on Sunday afternoon, as did several other countries. Usually these meetings are of particular importance during an election

year. And, although this was not an election year, nonetheless the meeting was a very important one. Jim Neal, Johns Hopkins University, and Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Chair of the Committee on Copyright, along with Mary Jackson, ARL office, presented a status report and discussed the U.S. leadership role in the protection of fair use of information. If the U.S. passes laws of restriction, relative to the current "fair use" definition, then other countries will follow suit. "The position of libraries and library professional associations is the only one for the common good."

Two sessions on Tuesday dealt with this issue, one sponsored by University Libraries and the other General Research Libraries, and included papers by Emanuella J. C. Giavarra (European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Association, Brussels, Belgium), "EUUP - European Copyright User Platform;" Duane E. Webster (ARL, Washington, D. C., U.S.A.), "Copyright, Libraries, and the Electronic Information Environment: Discussions and Developments in the United States;" and Ole Bronmo (Trondheim University, Trondheim, Norway), "Copyright Legislation: Fair Use and the Efficient Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge."

The second session was under Document Delivery and Interlending with speakers Mary E. Jackson (ARL, Washington, D.C., U.S.A.), "Copyright in the United States: Current Developments and Initiatives;" Graham P. Cornish (Universal Availability of Publications - UAP, Core Programme, Boston Spa, Wetherby, U.K.),

"Electronic Copyright Management Systems: Dream, Nightmare or Reality"; and Elena Eronina (Russian National Public Library for Science and Technology, Moscow, Russia), "Copyright and Russian Libraries: Interlending and Document Delivery Services." A web site is available on this topic at DFC.ORG/DFC and is linked to IFLANET. It is not too late to influence the bills in the U.S., especially with communications to congressmen on the Intellectual Copyright Protection Committee.

Always a highlight of the conference is the opening and plenary sessions and this year was no exception. In fact, this year was somewhat special with the arrival and participation of the Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, Li Peng. He spoke of libraries as the treasure house of knowledge throughout the centuries, an irony in itself relative to China's history and the cultural revolution. He also encouraged the delegates through this conference to make friends, exchange information and make it a success for the international library community. Again, the contrast in words and actions because at the same time China is controlling access to the Internet in the world community of China.

Bob Wedgeworth, (University of Illinois, U.S.A.), IFLA President, [Picture E] spoke of China as energized by the world's largest population, as could be seen by such a large delegation at the conference. He addressed the status of librarians around the world and the growing gap between the advanced countries and the lesser developed ones; ease of access for everyone, and asked if

we were prepared to bring the same kind of Organization "to the electronic information on the Internet as we have, as information professionals, to printed information. Information is the most valuable resource we have to exchange." Bob quoted one librarian as saying, "We have to find a solution to providing access to an excess of information."

In China's case they plan to put a library in every city by 2010, as part of the process to stimulate economic growth. This fact was also reported in the *China Daily*. Articles also appeared under headlines of "Library for the Blind to Expand" and plan to become the largest of its kind in 15 years. This after opening only two years ago. China has a blind population of 770,000 people; and, "Military academies get on line" with the Chinese military to install an information computer network for the library of every academy in three years. These leaders have emphasized the importance of information resources in modern wars. The objective, as reported at IFLA, is to improve troops' fighting capability. Efforts will be made to improve computer networks in these academies and link all academies by the turn of the century. The National Defense University is developing software for this purpose.

The session brought speakers from FID, International Federation for documentation, ICA (International Conference of Archives) and the ICA medal was awarded to Bob Wedgeworth, IPA (International Publishers Association), who noted the International Day of the book and copyright. It was also announced that an article had appeared in the July issue of *Science*, by Ping, on the "Future of Chinese Science

and Economic Development.” And, while the Internet was derided somewhat when it was referred to as the WWW - World Wide Wait, a speaker from UNESCO called it the planetary talmud. The contrasts continued.

The Group was entertained by a large group of male and female vocalists singing some of the softest, most melodic Chinese music imaginable - the room was speechless and entranced. This set the stage for keynote speaker, 86 year old Fei Xinotong. His paper is available in the conference papers and although I have not verified it, it is likely available at the IFLANET site.

One of the best sessions I heard was sponsored by the Information Technology Standing Committee on “Digital Libraries, Technologies and Organizational Impacts.” This session addressed the digital world of information but concluded that digital is not necessarily useable. There are questions on expense of digital libraries versus print, who has responsibility for preservation of information in this environment-- is it the creator’s for example, and the need to invest in people not just technology in this environment.

Bob Wedgeworth, IFLA President, established the Committee on Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (CAIFE) at the 1995 conference in Istanbul, Turkey. Marianna Tax Choldin, (University of Illinois, Illinois, U.S.A.), gave a lecture on “Beginning a Conversation on Access to Information and Freedom of Expression.” This was followed up with an open forum later in the week where questions could be raised for discussion at that time. This was an excellent lecture and provided a very

sound and non-belligerent basis for IFLA to proceed with this issue internationally.

Other subject sessions, meetings for program planning, poster presentations, exhibits and the Internet room required the usual amount of decision making at a conference, on where to go when during the day. In the evening, however, the choices, relative to the conference are made, and usually to the delight of everyone.

It is customary for the host country to offer special evening events, and Tuesday night the city of Beijing and China offered its best. An extraordinary array of Chinese music, both instrumental and vocal, acrobatics that were truly amazing, excerpts from the Beijing Opera--“The Monkey King,” magic and western classical music which included the Beijing Symphony and male and female opera performances. The staging, color and sheer perfection were awe-inspiring. And, just as remarkable was the organization of 78 buses enroute from the Beijing International Convention Center (BICC) to the Beijing Exhibition Center Theatre by military escort.

A surprise to many of us that had by then some experience going from BICC and our conference hotel to downtown Beijing and the traffic one encounters. Suddenly we moved out, no start and stop, just moving steadily and with reasonable speed. We noticed traffic was light to non-existent and wondered why. Then we saw that traffic was moving out of the inside third lane and at cross-streets--everyone waited, bicycles, carts, buses, cars, trucks, and pedestrians. And, some were gathered on the overpasses as we went through. In 15 minutes we were there. Impressive and

startling. No one broke the lines, no one drove, rode, or walked where they knew not to, and the military police were in sight at crossroads and down the middle of the street. Such occasions were the only time we saw the military in China, other than in an exercise/training session on the inside grounds surrounding Mao's tomb. Another contrast; some of our U.S. delegates commented that finally information professionals were getting the recognition they deserved, as seen by this high-ranking escort; while others from the U.S. were offended that a country should have such unmitigated power over the people and their lives. One man, from Indonesia that I spoke with after arriving at the theatre, felt it was simply the best thing to do, after all it got us there quickly and efficiently so the performance could begin on time. In his opinion it was the only way to do it; and, in his country it happened frequently and he saw no problem. On the way back to our hotel and conference center, two hours later, we experienced the same escort service.

The following night we had the same military escort service to and from the Great Hall of the People where the banquet was held. The surroundings were impressive, but the food was not. In fact, most of the food we had while in China was forgettable; my only memorable food was "beggars chicken" --a dinner a small group of us had as part of a pre-conference tour in Hong Kong.

I visited two library and information facilities while in Beijing. The National Library of China [Picture F] was a huge building and in seemingly good condition, but it was impossible to assess what kind of collection it had. Our guides focused

on English material and their associated catalogs. Their canned speeches and descriptions may have had more to do with their English capability than their lack of materials, but questions went mostly unanswered. The work areas, such as in cataloging, did not look "used," "productive," or "busy." We speculated that perhaps they had just cleaned up, an extensive "spit and polish" for our visits. It was disappointing, however, to see so little -- even users were mostly non-existent.

My visit to the second facility was another evening and this time my destination was the Institute of Science and Technology Information of China (ISTIC) [Picture G] (No escort, and the ride was 50 minutes due mostly to traffic). We were given a warm welcome at the door by Dr. Liu Zhaodong, Director General. [Picture H] We were shown a video on the institute (with rows of full stacks of bound material - over 10 million items) and were told that ISTIC was founded in 1956 for the development of socialist economic development in China. Their scope of business includes information science, information collection and service, information technology development, information research and consultancy, information exchange and transaction, training and education, and international cooperation. In August, 1996, ISTIC established an Info-Mart for work with other countries, and has an established base in the U.S. They currently support a Masters program and are planning a PhD level program. Dr. Liu acknowledged help from UNESCO, U.S.A., U.K., and other European countries. The tour of the facility left

one with a contrast in what was shown and said on the video and the modern office complex we first entered with what we were shown and told as we toured the complex. No offices were open, (it was after 5:00 p.m. and everyone had gone home, we were told) and no materials were seen of any kind. Instead they were renovating the upper floors, including the second floor where we were taken on tour. In fairness, the material could be stored somewhere else, but that wasn't explained. ISTIC had some computer systems and computer-aided processes on display and did indicate 1.2 million documents in their database - whether it contained full text or records associated with an item was not explained. Perhaps this is another goal for China and perhaps it was just a miscommunication due to the language differences. Contrasts come in all flavors.

The closing session brought a recap of the programs in Beijing and focus of IFLA's Mid-Term programmes for 1997 - 2001 on digital information. IFLA's stated direction will be on the electronic environment.

President Wedgeworth announced that IFLA will establish a mirror site of IFLANET to handle the hours that the North American site is not available at its location in Toronto, Canada. He noted too that this conference was Eric Spicer's 30th consecutive year attending IFLA. Each year Wedgeworth tries to find one word that sums up the conference and its locale; in Cuba, it was "sabroso," in Turkey it was "exotic," and his word for China was "overwhelmed." I think he was right on target in each case. He also indicated that the ICA and IFLA had planned a joint

meeting and banquet for 1 September 1996, to address the work facing the 21st century and to bring the effort needed by each organization together by addressing joint work between these organizations.

The closing lecture was given by Alain Peyrefitte. He proceeded to state a love and respect for books as our treasure--for us and for future generations. He continued by tracing the history of the book from inscriptions on bones to the use of paper, on to the printing and invention of mobile characters. And, of course to the computer and electronic information, but felt none of this replaced the librarian assisting the user with access and use of this information. The general feeling from colleagues with whom I discussed his lecture was that it was not at an appropriate level for this audience. For me it was reminiscent of my Master's degree in Library and Information Science days and the required (and I might add wonderful) course on "History of the Book." For the layperson, presented well, it is a fascinating tale. But, the cameraman next to where I was sitting, fell asleep.

The conference was certainly a success by any measure, and we were warmly welcomed and inspired by colleagues in this country of contrasts. A crowning example was the bicycle ride of Mr. Dong Ming from the Sanweishuwu Book Shop, who rode a bicycle from Shenyang, Liaoning Province, to Beijing at his own expense over nine days. He promoted the conference along the way, made a banner, and invited librarians to sign it. IFLA President, Bob Wedgeworth signed the banner and introduced Mr. Dong at the IFLA Closing Session.

Bicycles are everywhere, but so are cars, buses, trucks, and some mobile things you would be hard pressed to give a name. People are also still used to move things, as if they were an animal of burden. The cities including Beijing have a tremendous amount of growth going on as can be seen in all the construction. In fact, it appeared as if all the cranes in all of Asia had been moved to China--they were on every horizon.

Next to large, ultra-modern buildings, there were the older ghetto-like slums, with use of a common outside toilet, one for men and one for women. There are large attractive restaurants, and Pizza Hut and McDonalds attracts large numbers of Chinese. In contrast you will see workers stooped on the sidewalks outside of some places washing their dishes or, as in one instance, skinning live snakes for serving in the restaurant.

It also became clear that with so many changes in such a large country that "managing" that change was an incredible task. While it is the nature of us westerners to want to see democracy come to China and more freedom for the people, after being there, seeing and experiencing that country, one can't help but think the Chinese are approaching this change in the way they should. A way that is best for the country and the people in the long run, although it will likely take longer and may not in the end be what we might ultimately desire it to be. But, I think the people will decide that.

I offer this last contrast. Several of us were in the former Soviet Union for IFLA when the coup occurred in 1991. I met a colleague there, and we have continued contact with each other since

then. In Beijing, after an evening's conference program, I asked how things were in Russia now. He said, they were okay, but not great, and that a lot of money had been spent on the election and so on. I asked about a comparison between what he saw in Beijing and Russia. He immediately responded, that there was no comparison really, nothing like the burgeoning economic changes in Beijing and China were happening in Russia. He indicated that some of the older buildings were being restored in his country and that was wonderful, but the construction and business he was seeing was overwhelming in China. And, it was true for all of us. China was certainly overwhelming and almost impossible to feel or even sense that you were in a communist country. The hustle and bustle in Beijing, even with thousands riding bicycles to work, was otherwise more reminiscent of New York.

There were no red flags flying or pictures of former Chairman Mao, there were no soldiers to speak of either. There were, however, thousands of industrious and hard working Chinese and entrepreneurs everywhere in all kinds and sizes of business. There were also new friends and colleagues and once again a conference uniting professionals and their work in information management, from one side of the globe to the other. We are all fortunate to have participated at such a wonderful time in China's history and ours as well.

TABLE 1
IFLA Sessions - Beijing 1996

Parliamentary Libraries of Asia and the Pacific
Internet Discussion Group
Statistics
Performance Measurement
Principles Underlying Subject Heading Languages
Public Libraries and Economic Development
Regional and Global Cooperation Among Parliamentary Libraries: A Ten-Year Vision
The Links Between Map Libraries and Economic Development
Collection and Access for Asian Rare Books and Manuscripts
Digital Libraries, Technologies and Organizational Impacts
Library Buildings in China
Women's Issues
How are National Libraries Using Information Technology to Forward their Overall Strategy?
Preserving the Documentary Heritage of Asia
Client-centered Approach: Implications for Continuing Professional Education
Cooperative Cataloguing Projects: Economic Benefits Through Resource Sharing
How to Develop your Library Association
National Strategies on Library Services to the Print Disabled
Copyright Questions on Document Delivery and Interlending
Chinese American Librarians' Activities in the Changing World, which included panels on Libraries as Gateways to Information; Continuing Education of Librarians in a Changing World; and Resource Sharing (including the electronic environment)
Chinese Libraries and Collections Within and Outside China
Copyright and Fair Use in the Electronic Information Age: Implications for Academic Libraries
The Changing Economics of Acquisitions
Children's Libraries and Children's Reading in China
The Evolving Research Libraries and East Asian Studies
Statistics for Library Management
Providing Access to Serials and Serials Information
The History of Libraries and Librarianship in the Far East during the 21st Century
Management of Science and Technology Journals in a Time of Change

Change and Innovation in Library and Information Science Education
Authority Control
The Impact of New Technology on Social Science Libraries
Asian Newspapers
The Challenge of Change: Reading Promotion to Special Groups
Access to Human Rights Documentation
Cooperation and Planning with Teachers
Library Journals in Developing Countries: Opportunities and Difficulties
AV and Multimedia in Libraries from a Chinese and an International Point of View
Information Literacy: Global Perspectives
Financing Library Services: Changing Approaches

TABLE 2

IFLA Workshops - Beijing 1996

Retrospective Conversion: Lessons Learned and New Tasks
Architectural Competitions
Digital Talking Books Technology: The Next Generation
Pay or Profit: Fee or Free
Storytelling
Dewey Decimal Classification: Edition 21 and International Perspectives
Charging for Document Delivery and Interlending
Chinese Library and Information Science Education
World Mapping
Aid Agency Information Services Assisting Economic Development
How to Run a Library Association
ISSN Network: The work of ISSN Centres
Connections and Collaborations: Using the Internet in Libraries
Managing Academic Libraries: The Challenge of Change
Serving Multi-Cultural Populations in the 21st Century: Universal
Standardized Subject Headings - Present Status and Future Prospects

Wilda Newman is located at The Johns Hopkins University, Applied
Physics Laboratory, Johns Hopkins Road, Laurel, MD 20723-6099.
Phone: 301/953-5721; Fax: 301/953-1093
E-mail: wilda.newman@jhuapl.edu



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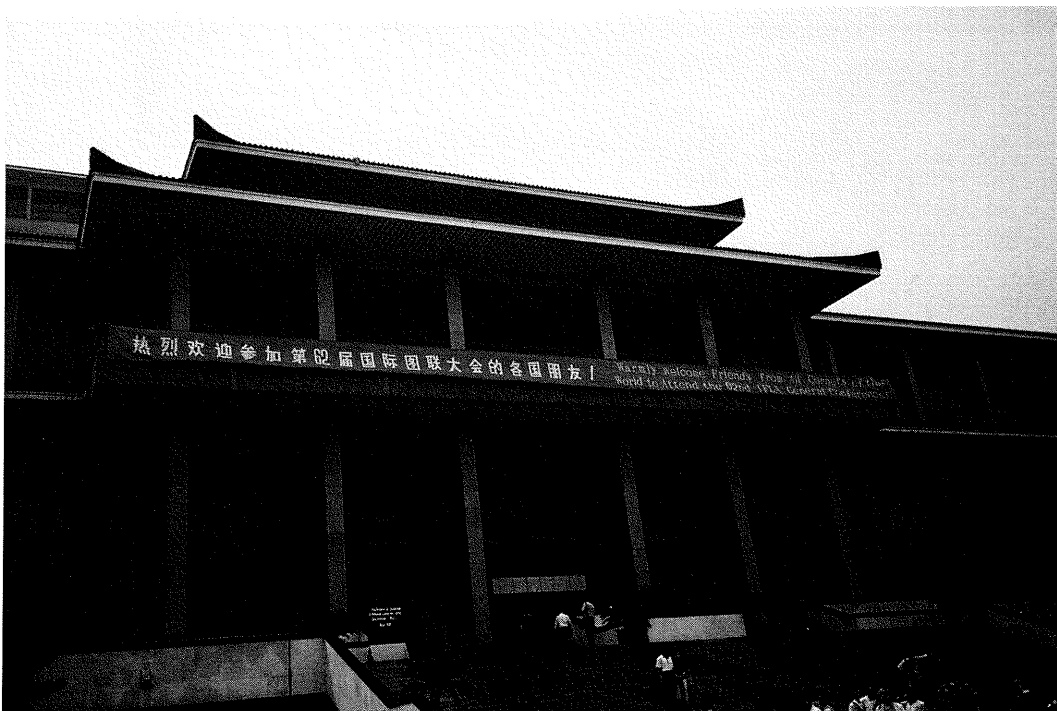
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G



H

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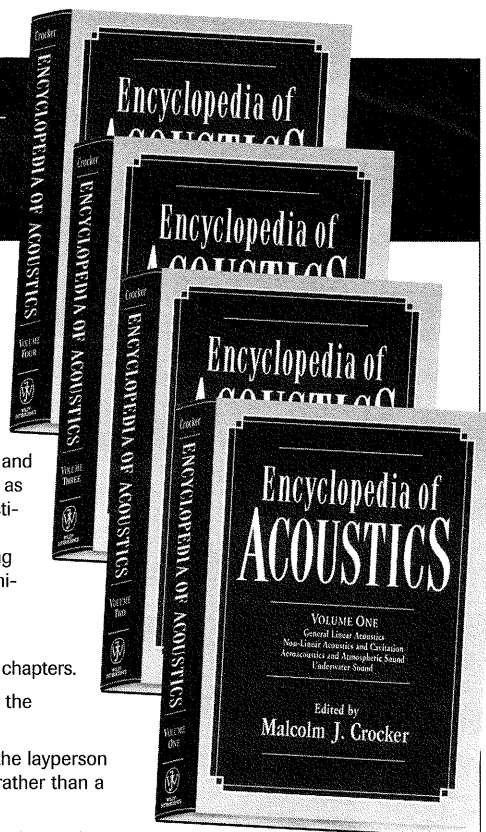
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